

THE CATALYTIC ACTION OF Al^{+++} IONS IN
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Roczniki Chemii 28 (1954) 3-11

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Al^{+++} ions are practically inactive in the reaction of the decomposition of H_2O_2 and in the reaction of the peroxidative oxidation of various organic substrates. In conjunction with other micro-elements and suitable carrier substances, however, the activity of the Al^{+++} ions may be strong and the specific action of this element is then important.

The advantageous influence of Al^{+++} as catalytic agent of certain organic reactions has long been known. The Friedel and Crafts reactions, inter alia, are good examples of this. As is well known, the course of these reactions depends upon the presence of $AlCl_3$.

With regard to bio-catalytic systems, the action of Al^{+++} ions was investigated first of all by plant physiologists and soil experts [1]*. According to the opinion of the experts, Al^{+++} ions even in very low concentrations, exert on the whole a harmful influence on the growth of many plants, especially in an acid environment. It appears, however, that there are exceptions to this rule, as is shown by the investigations of Znamieski [2] who originally observed the advantageous action of the element by accident in a variety of wheat (*Triticum pseudohostianum*).

In the reduction-oxidation systems investigated in recent years in this Institute [3], the Al^{+++} ion behaves fundamentally in an inert manner. It does not decompose H_2O_2 or intervene in reactions for the removal of oxygen on oxidised substrates. Nevertheless, the fact does not justify the assertion that Al^{+++} ions are altogether deprived of any influence on catalytic actions of this type. In the article "On the sociology of chemical elements" [3,4], we have endeavoured to explain that it is impossible to predict the catalytic properties of any element or ion, as long as we do not know its position in the group of other elements, in the sphere of which the said element, as a catalytic agent, may have an entirely different form from that which it has as a separate individual. It had therefore to be assumed that in association with complex catalysts, the Al^{+++} ion would be able to act as an inhibiting agent or as promoter, according to the prevailing experimental conditions in relation to a given catalytic reaction taking place with a suitable substrate. In fact, in the course of our investigations on catalysis and catalysts, we found characteristic examples of complex catalysts exhibiting the two-fold behaviour of Al^{+++} ions in reduction-oxidation systems. The results of these investigations are given in the following account.

1. Al^{+++} IONS AS INHIBITING AGENT

When investigating the various systems of complex catalysts we had the opportunity of repeatedly confirming the fact that Al^{+++} ions in many cases exercise an inhibiting action in the decomposition of H_2O_2 at a temperature of 37° . As catalyst supporters or carriers for the Al^{+++} ions, we used the following complex gels which were prepared by careful mixing and air drying.

- (1) Mixed gel of aluminium, chromium and iron hydroxides precipitated at a temperature of 20° by addition of a small amount of ammonia to an aqueous solution containing $AlCl_3 + CrCl_3 + Fe(NO_3)_3$ in the atomic proportions $Al:Cr:Fe = 1:1:1$. The water content of the air-dried gel was 44.4% H_2O .

* For references, see end.

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- (2) Mixed gel of copper + lead + iron hydroxides of a light-brown colour, precipitated at a temperature of 20° by sodium hydroxide (free from O_2) in stoichiometric proportions from a mixed aqueous solution of $\text{Cu}(\text{NO}_3)_2 + \text{Pb}(\text{NO}_3)_2 + \text{Fe}(\text{NO}_3)_3$ in the atomic proportions $\text{Cu:Pb:Fe} = 1:1:1$. The air-dried gel contained about 21.8% H_2O .
- (3) Mixed gel of magnesium + copper + iron hydroxides obtained by precipitation from an aqueous solution of $\text{MgCl}_2 + \text{CuSO}_4 + \text{FeCl}_3$ (atomic proportions $\text{Mg:Cu:Fe} = 0.3:0.3:1$) by adding NaOH in small amounts at a temperature of 20° . The air-dried gel contained about 38.5% H_2O .
- (4) Gel of cobalt ferrocyanide prepared at a temperature of 20° from an aqueous solution of $\text{Na}_4[\text{Fe}(\text{CN})_6] + \text{Cu}(\text{NO}_3)_2$ in stoichiometric proportions, NH_4Cl being used as coagulant. The air-dried preparation contained about 12% H_2O .

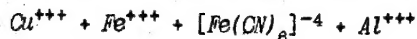
All the preparations 1 to 4 decomposed H_2O_2 vigorously at a temperature of 37° . The Al^{+++} ion adsorbed on the surface of these catalysts was a paralysing agent in all the experiments, sometimes very active. In an experiment of a mixed catalyst (5 mg) of copper, magnesium and iron hydroxides, the activity of the Al^{+++} ions was still perceptible in a density of 10^6 g in 201 ml of H_2O_2 solution, i.e. in a dilution of 1:200 millions. The results of these experiments are shown in Tables 1, 2 and 3*.

In the course of these investigations, we also found simple catalysts exhibiting susceptibility to the poisoning action of Al^{+++} ions. According to Wolski's investigations [5], the catalytic activity of copper oxide (10 mg) undergoes a considerable diminution in the presence of 1 mg of Al^{+++} . The air-dried copper oxide contained 4.3% H_2O and was obtained in the wet method by preparing a gel of $\text{Cu}(\text{OH})_2$ in an alkaline solution (1 N NaOH). The results obtained are shown in Table 4.

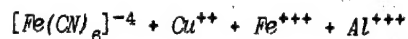
II. Al^{+++} ION AS PROMOTER

In passing to the action of Al^{+++} ions as an activating agent, it must be stated that in general this element is found less frequently in the role of promoter than as an inhibitor. When investigating the efficiency of different catalysts and carriers in reduction-oxidation systems in the presence of certain substrates, we found that copper oxide, of which we have already spoken is activated by Al^{+++} , when it is a matter of the oxidation of indigo-carmin by means of H_2O_2 (Table 4).

Nevertheless, the Al^{+++} may likewise be an activator in the reaction of the catalytic decomposition of H_2O_2 . A good example of this is the complex catalyst of a gel of copper-iron ferrocyanide, investigated recently [6]. The efficiency of this catalyst is increased considerably under the influence of Al^{+++} , as is shown by the figures given in Table 5. We have investigated the so-called catalytic mutation [7], the influence of which is sufficiently clearly marked. The order in which the separate components of the catalyst are added during its preparation is not immaterial. The most advantageous combination, as follows from Table 5, is the following order:



On the other hand, the order



was less advantageous.

The above figures show that the Al^{+++} acted in these systems as an efficient activator, especially in relatively high concentrations (10^{-2} g and 10^{-3} g Al^{+++}). This action disappeared on reducing the concentration to 10^{-5} g Al^{+++} in 200 ml of H_2O_2 .

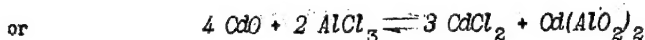
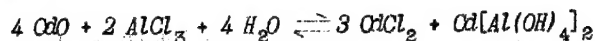
If the complex catalyst investigated is used in the system $\text{HCOOH}/\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$, there occurs an intense acceleration of the oxidation reaction of the formic acid at a temperature of 37° , as shown by our previous investigations [8]. The addition of Al^{+++} ions was not without influence in this case also, since it produced - it is true in different degrees - a slight inhibition of the oxidation reaction of formic acid, depending on the mutation employed (see above). On comparing the figures given in Tables 5 and 6, one is struck above all by the fact that the strongest inhibiting action of the Al^{+++} ion in the peroxidative reaction is found in the combination of the catalyst ($\text{Cu}^{++} + \text{Fe}^{+++} + [\text{Fe}(\text{CN})_6]^{-4}$) in connection with which the Al^{+++} ion

* For Tables, see end.

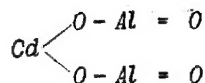
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was the most efficient catalytic promoter in the reaction of the decomposition of H_2O_2 (Table 5). Generally speaking, the position is similar to that obtaining in the case of the catalyst Cu/Al^{+++} , although in the converse relation, since in these conditions, the Al^{+++} ion was distinguished as a peroxidative activator, being simultaneously a catalytic inhibitor.

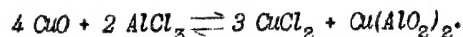
The catalytic action of Al^{+++} ions in reduction-oxidation systems is thus twofold and to a high degree specific. Since a similar phenomenon - although not in such a striking form - has been considered by us in the case of other ions (for example Co^{+++}) [8], the conjecture arises that a certain rule is involved here, from which there may also be exceptions. Recently, Winowski [9], when investigating CdO as a carrier, found that the Al^{+++} ion also produced a diminution in the decomposition of H_2O_2 and of the peroxidative oxidation of indigo carmine, from which it would be necessary to infer that, due to the partial exchange of both components, a relatively durable (stable and inactive) complex compound (cadmium hydroxy-aluminate or cadmium aluminate) is formed, resulting in the blocking of the active centres on the surface of the cadmium oxide:



The structural formula of this compound would be written as follows:

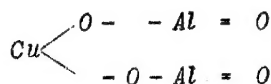


It is unquestionable that copper oxide is also subject to such an exchange with Al^{+++} :

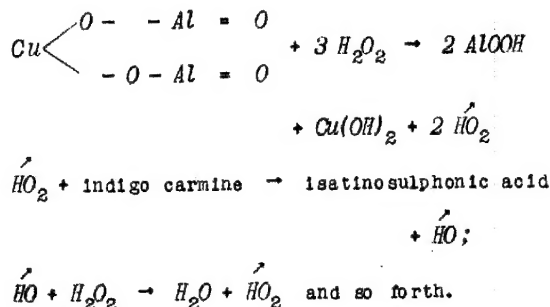


Nevertheless, the structural (diagrammatic) formula of copper hydroxy-aluminate or copper aluminate must be given in a different way, distinguishing its peculiar structure, which would be expressed by an increased peroxidative activity of this compound, taking into account its simultaneous inactivity in the decomposition of H_2O_2 .

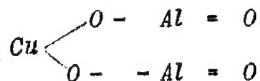
The structural formula



satisfies this requirement, because as a result of the action of H_2O_2 only HO_2 radicals will be the cause of the oxidation (dehydrogenation) of the organic substrate:



On the other hand, it does not seem that the structural formula



is correct, since in the reaction with $2 H_2O_2$, the radicals HO and HO_2 would attack simultaneously, of which especially the former may initiate an uninterrupted chain of reactions of the decomposition of H_2O_2 , which would not be consistent with the passivity of the catalyst CuO/Al^{+++} with regard to the oxidation of hydrogen peroxide.

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TABLE 1

Inhibiting action of Al^{+++} ions in the decomposition of H_2O_2 at a temperature of 37° .
 200 ml H_2O_2 (about 0.3%) + 10^{-3} g Al^{+++} in 1 ml + carrier I = aluminium + chromium + iron hydroxides or carrier II = cobalt ferrocyanide.

10 ml solution = 0.1 ml 0.1 n $KMnO_4$.

Time min.	0.1 g I	0.1 g I + 10^{-3} g Al^{+++}	0.1 g II	0.1 g II + 10^{-3} g Al^{+++}	10^{-3} g Al^{+++}		Blank test	
$0_0 \rightarrow$	17.6	17.6	16.2	16.2	17.6	16.2	17.6	16.2
30	17.0	17.1	15.2	15.7	.	.	.	.
60	16.1	16.5	14.3	15.2	.	.	.	.
120	13.9	15.0	12.5	13.9	.	.	.	.
180	11.4	12.5	10.6	12.2	.	.	.	.
240	9.3	10.6	9.0	11.3	.	.	.	.
300	7.4	8.8	7.8	10.2	16.3	15.7	17.6	15.7

NOTE: The Al^{+++} ions used in the form of aqueous solutions of $AlCl_3$ for carrier I or $Al_2(SO_4)_3$ for carrier II.

TABLE 2

Inhibiting action of Al^{+++} ions in the decomposition of H_2O_2 at a temperature of 37° .
 200 ml H_2O_2 (about 0.3%) + 1 ml Al^{+++} (in the concentration as below) + carrier (c): copper + lead + iron hydroxides (5 mg).

10 ml solution = 0.1 ml 0.1 n $KMnO_4$.

Time min.	Alone (c)	(c) + 10^{-3} g Al^{+++}	(c) + 10^{-4} g Al^{+++}	(c) + 10^{-5} g Al^{+++}	Blank test
$0_0 \rightarrow$	19.0	19.0	19.0	19.0	19.0
60	15.3	16.0	15.9	15.1	.
120	10.3	14.5	13.0	10.8	.
240	4.4	11.5	6.8	4.8	.
300	2.1	10.0	4.5	2.4	18.6

NOTE: The Al^{+++} ions used in the form of an aqueous solution of $Al_2(SO_4)_3$.

TABLE 3

Inhibiting action of Al^{+++} ions in the decomposition of H_2O_2 at a temperature of 37° .
 Carrier (c): copper + magnesium + iron hydroxides (5 mg). Further details as in Table 2.

Time min.	Alone (c)	(c) + 10^{-3} g Al^{+++}	(c) + 10^{-4} g Al^{+++}	(c) + 10^{-5} g Al^{+++}	(c) + 10^{-6} g Al^{+++}	(c) + 10^{-7} g Al^{+++}
$0_0 \rightarrow$	18.3	18.3	18.3	18.3	18.3	18.3
60	14.8	16.1	15.8	15.4	15.2	15.0
120	11.2	14.9	14.4	13.1	12.8	12.0
240	5.1	12.2	10.4	6.6	6.5	5.1
300	3.2	11.0	8.5	4.1	4.1	3.1

NOTE: The Al^{+++} ions used in the form of an aqueous solution of $Al_2(SO_4)_3$.

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TABLE 4

Catalyst $\text{CuO} + \text{Al}^{+++}$ in the decomposition of H_2O_2 (I), in the peroxidative oxidation of indigo-carmin (II) at a temperature of 37° .

I. 10 mg $\text{CuO} + 1$ mg Al^{+++} in 1 ml + 150 ml H_2O_2 ($\approx 3\%$): 10 ml solution = a_0 ml n KMnO_4 .

II. 1 mg $\text{CuO} + 1$ mg Al^{+++} in 1 ml + 30 ml indigo-carmin (= 10.8 mg dy) + 150 ml H_2O_2 ($\approx 3\%$).

The concentration of the dye given below in grams per litre was indicated by colorimetry (Visomat).

Time min.	I				Time min.	II			
	CuO	$\text{CuO} + \text{Al}^{+++}$	Al^{+++}	Blank test		CuO	$\text{CuO} + \text{Al}^{+++}$	Al^{+++}	Blank test
$a_0 \rightarrow$	19.7	19.7	19.7	19.7	0	0.060	0.060	0.060	0.060
30	18.0	19.4	18.9	19.7	15	0.055	0.044	0.053	.
60	18.1	19.3	18.9	19.6	30	0.045	0.027	0.048	.
90	13.4	19.0	18.9	19.6	45	0.034	0.015	0.042	.
180	43	17.8	18.8	19.4	60	0.028	-	0.035	0.060

NOTE: The Al^{+++} ions were used in the form of an aqueous solution of AlCl_3 .

TABLE 6

Inhibiting influence of Al^{+++} ions (in the concentration as below in 1 ml) in the peroxidative oxidation of formic acid at a temperature of 37° in the presence of the basic catalyst (I) = $[\text{Fe}(\text{CN})_6]^{-4} + \text{Cu}^{++} + \text{Fe}^{+++}$ or (II) = $\text{Cu}^{++} + \text{Fe}^{+++} + [\text{Fe}(\text{CN})_6]^{-4}$ (cf. Table 5) + 100 ml H_2O_2 ($\approx 0.6\%$) + 100 ml 0.1 n HCOOH .

10 ml of solution = a_0 ml 0.02 n NaOH .

Time min.	I Without Al^{+++}	I + 10^{-2}g Al^{+++}	I + 10^{-3}g Al^{+++}	I + 10^{-2}g Al^{+++}	II + 10^{-2}g Al^{+++}	10^{-2}g Al^{+++}	$\text{H}_2\text{O}_2 + \text{HCOOH}$ without catalyst (blank test)
$a_0 \rightarrow$	24.9	24.9	24.9	24.9	24.9	24.9	24.9
40	17.5	19.3	18.0	17.6	19.5	.	.
80	6.6	9.7	8.0	6.9	11.7	.	.
120	2.8	5.7	4.1	3.2	6.8	.	.
140	2.1	5.0	3.0	2.9	5.7	24.4	24.3

TABLE 5

Catalytic mutation in the decomposition of H_2O_2 at a temperature of 37° . Complex catalyst (I) prepared in the order $[Fe(CN)_6]^{-4} + Cu^{+++} + Fe^{+++}$ (10ms per 1 mg in 1 ml) + Al^{+++} m 1 ml (in the proportions given below) + 200 ml H_2O_2 (~3%). Catalyst (II) prepared in the order $Cu^{+++} + Fe^{+++} + [Fe(CN)_6]^{-4} + Al^{+++}$. 10 ml of solution = Q_0 ml 0.1 n $KMnO_4$.

Time min.	(I)					(II)					$10^{-2}g$ Al^{+++}	H_2O_2 without catalyst (blank test)
	Without Al^{+++}	$+ 10^{-2}g$ Al^{+++}	$+ 10^{-3}g$ Al^{+++}	$+ 10^{-4}g$ Al^{+++}	$+ 10^{-5}g$ Al^{+++}	Without Al^{+++}	$+ 10^{-2}g$ Al^{+++}	$+ 10^{-3}g$ Al^{+++}	$+ 10^{-4}g$ Al^{+++}	$+ 10^{-5}g$ Al^{+++}		
Q_0	16.3	16.3	16.3	16.3	16.3	16.3	16.3	16.3	16.3	16.3	16.3	16.3
60	13.1	12.4	12.5	12.8	13.0	13.0	11.2	12.8	12.8	13.1	16.2	16.3
120	11.8	8.5	9.7	11.4	11.3	10.9	6.5	9.8	11.0	11.0	16.0	16.1
240	9.6	3.2	5.6	8.7	9.2	8.4	2.3	5.6	7.7	8.0	15.8	16.0
300	8.9	2.0	4.1	7.2	8.6	7.3	1.1	3.9	6.1	6.8	15.7	15.8

NOTE: The above ions were used in the form of aqueous solutions of $K_4[Fe(CN)_6]$, $CuSO_4$, $Fe(NO_3)_3$, $Al_2(SO_4)_3$. All the agents were of maximum purity (Merck, pro anal.).